a grim smile.

"Smallpox" he said curtly "Going in with me. Benson?" vivid hatred of Jim Hanecy. He was killing a tremendous amount of time man should pay us." a rather small man, soft-spoken, very in doing it.

graft and evil in China. "The game isn't worth the candle," he answered.

Hanecy regarded him with that bronzed hatchet face. The two men stood in a side street of Cheng-tu. Somewhere in or near this city, 1,500 grave of the Emperor Ling Ti of the cleada and making money-talk. The tions, and into each portion firmly with Benson, and he rather suspected eyes widened. Han dynasty-objects which, from an historical and artistic standpoint of value, were worth their weight in rubles to any collector or museum.

One of those objects had been in the possession of the man who had just died of smallpox.

"One word, Benson," said Hanecy slowly. "You're a clever devil. The mandarin here is working for you. You'd cheerfully pay high to have me killed. Now, Benson, you're too slick to give me any excuse for coming to you and putting a bullet into your ugly hide-but you look out! All I want is the excuse!"

Benson produced a cigarette and lighted it. He knew that Jim Hanecy would shoot him if given an excuse-Hanecy had a reputation for keeping his word-but Benson was a man who never lost his head. So now he refused to let himself be snared into saying anything. Hanecy was only talking from suspicion, anyway. "You have gone into partnership

with Toptit, haven't you?" Benson inquired casually.

"I have!" snapped Hanecy. "And we mean to get the whole Ling Ti outfit."

Benson smiled, waved his cigarette with an assurance that maddened Hanecy, and responded:

"There's one piece you won't getnobody will get it! That's the piece in there, the tongue-amulet of Ling Ti. It's been lost. The man is dead.' "You're such a cursed liar I'd hate to believe you," said Hanecy sourly. "Then go in and ask."

HANECY turned on his heel and strode into the house of mourning. Benson glanced after him with a vivid gleam in his eyes, then shrugged his shoulders and walked away.

A few moments later Jim Hanecy came from the house, frowningly After all, Benson had told him the through the local mandarin or from inference was obvious. The man was pressed the belly side of the cicada. some trick here, some trap to enlet had disappeared some days pre- gray mustaches and bleary eyes. His portions. viously while the man lay sick. Now the man was dead and the amulet

"Tough luck," murmured Hanecy.

He slowly retraced his steps house of old Kiang, the fur merchant, nourishment. to be a complete checkmate.

bookshops, a naked little yellow boy was playing with a peculiar object which he had picked from a garbage

pile in the gutter. leaf-green. The boy had inserted a pression. cord through a hole in the nose, and

drew the cicada after him by the cord. It was a very pretty plaything. A poor scholar, who was earnest title justified, was sitting in contem-Ignorant or clever, scholars are the ordinary jade, fetched in from cicada was the amulet of the emperor man with the horn spectacles saw was genuine Chinese jade, such as what the boy was playing with and had not been found in China except realized that no real cicada would very rarely for about 2,000 years. last ten minutes at such a game: also.

cash. found that the cicada really was but they were beyond his ability to in the land and was wise in many carved from stone—a stone resem-bling jade, but like no jade that he did not see that two men had heard had ever seen. On the belly were his exclamation and had exchanged cut two characters of some ancient script which he could not read. Determining that it was a luck-piece, significance that "Free gold, by the scholar tucked it into his girdle George!" would have to an old-time and took his accustomed way to the California mining camp. In other south gate, toward the temple of the words, it is apt to start something. and took his accustomed way to the famous minister, Chu-ko Liang, where he was wont to study the two memorials of this great man-the memo-

China. Now, there were a number of things never would know, since he was a actly the same thing. mere learner of words and not an ethnologist.

embalmed. Instead, it was stuffed with jade—for jade was the essence mandarin, and they had heard a great picking up stuff. He knows the game dred taels in notes of the local govof the yang, or male principle of the deal of talk about Han yu and other universe, which would keep the body things. They knew that the white lionaire collector spotted and on his from corruption by the yin or female man was one of the largest dealers strings, and gets ten thousand for the forces of the earth. This at least was in antiques on the coast, and was right netsuke or snuff bottle. He's the theory. Even in the Han period, thick as a brother with the mandarin. also, there was a belief in the resur- As to the mandarin himself, they were though he'd just as soon steal his stauff rection of the dead, and hence into far too well acquainted with him to from the National Museum at Peking if he mouth of the corpse was slipped have any tears on the score of future a bit of jade carved in the shape of a punishment. cicada. The cicada, like the beetle of the Egyptians, was a symbol of the home, plunged into the Street of Ten | resurrection, and the jade cicada laid Thousand Bright Flowers. This was

mulet to guide him to the new life. Leaving the south gate, the scholar enssed on to the group of walled tem- children playing in the garbage. ples just outside the city. Entering these by the main gateway on the and startling thing. Beyond doubt, better transfer our attention to the ily of Wang, of five hundred silver black powder fumes. outh, the scholar quickly went to the Wang, the bookseller, had entered other things. You think Benson will dollars—ta-yang-chien. third and innermost gateway and found himself in the temple of the great general and minister.

ignored the hall, with its bronze clinking coins. drums brought by Chu-ko Liang from the Eurmest conquests, with its mag-

and inspected his enemy with years as memorials. Instead of these to the white man-" things, the scholar seated himself before the stones of the outer walls, things." upon which were inscribed the political testaments of the statesman, and scratched his nose reflectively. "But, you buy old jade, especially Han yu," amulet.

deadly, allied with all the forces of hunger apprised the scholar that he white man living at the Tu-kung and showed the wax impression that had not eaten. His lunch money had temple?" gone to buy a luck-piece. He took The first bandit nodded and the cicada from his girdle and in- grinned. same thin, dangerous smile on his spected it critically; in view of the absence luncheon, he did not now and buy some wax. Then come back." born. His duties detain him, and I by the soldiers. care so much for the thing.

roused the scholar. He glanced up to he returned with the wax the first | Hancey reflected. He knew that the

"True." The more astute robber

"Ah! Quite true," assented the stone-

"Go to that shop across the street

The second man obeyed, keeping his promised to bring you if you would A sound of clinking coins sharply eye carefully on his comrade. When care to see it."

yamen. The soldier did not know "He will buy it. He deals in such that there were two white men there, so he naturally addressed Hanecy. "Heavenborn, we have heard that nearby yamen to buy the emperor's

set himself to study and contemplate remember, there is a mandarin in the said the man humbly enough. "My curio dealers and agents in China. set himself to study and contemplate remember, there is a mandarin in the said the man humbly enough. My shook his head. Only the glitter in and reflect. The scholar was doubthis short-sighted eyes betrayed his less improving his soul, but he was will take all the money that the white man a jade which he took from the belly of a river fish. It is of green had Hancey safe in case Benson re- get into my hands. The facts prob-

he carried. "Ah!" said Hanecy. "And where is

this green insect?" "My comrade is keeping it, heaven-



THEN, FROM THE SCHOLAR BURST A CHATTERING SHOUT.

name was Wang, and he dealt in books; also, he was learned in many white man, tell him that I have this Han, and if Benson had secured the things-a reader of his own wares.

"Old Toptit will throw a fit when he string of cash. He bought it hastily buy it. Meantime, I will go to the him. Risk did not bother him apprefinds it's been lost. One of Benson's without daring to show his eagerness other white man, tell him that you clably. crooks may have stolen it—but I or to examine it very closely, and have the Han yu, and get an offer on "Where is your comrade now?" dethen shuffled off with the cicada it. They will see from the two char-manded Hancey. clutched in his palm, while the acters what it represents. The one the crowded streets to the scholar departed to seek substantial who offers most will get it."

awaited nim. So far as the emperor's outside the main entrance of the tells have in it when they had infisited. Was a comfortable walk, although a mulet was concerned, there seemed ple and opened his clenched fist. The With his wax impression, one sol-pleasant one—by the Lohan bridge very touch of the cool, sweet stone dier betook himself to the mandarin's and the river road, past the ancient In the Hsuo-tau-kai, or street of thrilled him; the feel of the wondrous yamen, not far from the south gate. temples. The afternoon was wearing hair-trigger edge. natina against his old palm was an ecstasy. He paid no son-a private audience-and gave his cincts of Chu-ko Liang's temple a regard to the fact that other men very good reason for keeping the poor scholar came from the entrance every one in the gambling joint was were all around, coming and going mandarin out of business. He told He was immensely proud of what he all about the cicada, which, according dead cicada, about two inches in had just bought, and was in avid to his story, had been found in the dead cicada, about two inches in haste to confirm his first hasty im- belly of a fish taken from the river, noble maxims which Chu-ko- Ling had length, of a beautiful transparent

resting in his hand. He noted the Benson began to get excited. The clear quality of the stone, its leaf- thing might really be a Han jade. green color, the deftness with which the artist had made dark spots nestle pression he had hard work to keep his enough but more ignorant than his like natural insect colorings in the jubilation from showing. The two diers obtained it? Through Benson, wings of the cicada. Wang, who had plation when the boy passed him. studied much, knew that this was not the name of Ling Ti. This leaf-green scholars the world over. This yellow Turkestan by the hundreweight. It _the amulet that had been lost!

"Han yu!" The words escaped his that this cicada seemed to be petrified or carved from stone. He called his own cleverness as for the stone's to the boy, and the cicada changed beauty. "Han yu! Jade of the Hans hands for a matter of two coppers— A tongue amulet from a grave!"

He turned over the cicada to exama swift glance. Han yu, to any na- on consignment, much of it from me; tive who knows, has much the same he has a goodly patter about Kien

Old Wang tucked away the cicada his wispy mustaches, and shuffled toward the city gate with a rapt smile years and buys what I have stored rials which have become classics and on his silly old face. Behind him up. He goes back home and shoots sources of political inspiration to followed two men, who, by their costume, were evidently members of the things up here and there-gets good provincial soldiery maintained by the prices, too. He's usually called an about this cicada which the poor local mandarin. By their faces they authority. He's the one who gets up scholar did not know and probably were bandits. Which amounted to ex-

In ancient China a body was not THESE two soldiers knew that a

Old Wang, taking the shortest cuts on the tongue of a dead man was an an evil little alley occupied by crowded tenements. It was at the moment deserted except for a few

Now was accomplished a mysterious that alley at one end, but he did not come out at all! Instead of Wang, two soldiers came out at the other end, moved a few feet distant to a WITH all the awful concentration patch of shade, and squatted down. of a scholar, he ignored the gar- One of them replaced a knife in his dens, the lake, the harp arbor; he sleeve, the other handed him some

> "There is half the money." "Ah! And the Han you?"

official sources. The emperor's amu- a merchant—an old fellow with wispy He gave his comrade one of the snare him. Still, what matter? That

Han yu, and will meet him just out- thing Hanecy was perfectly willing Wang bought the cicada for a small side the south gate if he wishes to to match wits and take it away from

The two mulled over this scheme sweaty Here he obtained audience with Benand bought by his comrade, who was transmitted to posterity. He looked at the green stone insect waiting. He described it exactly, and

But when Benson saw the wax im-

HANECY, reclined at his ease in a room of the Tu-kung temple, where his partner, Toptit, was domi ciled, was in one of his rarely talkative moods. Toptit was pretending to write more poetry, but was in reality jotting down what Hancey said-for Examining his purchase, the scholar ine the two ideographs on its belly, he knew that Hancey had been long

"There are several kinds of antique dealers. Toptit. One kind gets stuff Lung, Han periods and so forth. He doesn't know that there were three distinct Han periods-and his custom-

ers think he's a wonder. "Then there's the royal ass, who comes to China every three or four the bull about how he picked these auction catalogues and refers any old bronze to Shang or Chou, especially if it has a date. He doesn't know

that ancient date marks spells fraud. "Then there's the man who has a white man was the guest of the firm, and who spends his time here down to the ground, has every milon the level with his customers, alhe had to get it that way-

"Ah!" said Toptit with interest. "That's Benson." "That's Benson," said Hanecy, grinthe morning, are you?"

Toptit nodded soberly. "Yes. I'm going to trail down some more of this Ling Ti stuff. It seems certain that Bright Flowers. There was a reward A revolver showed in his hand and the emperor's amulet is lost, so we'd for the murderer, offered by the fam- an explosion filled the room with trail me "

"No-but you'll be trailed," said Hanecy drily. He yawned and rose. morning to see that you get off safe." He left the little temple of the

wax impression showed the name of "Go you to the yamen. Seek the Ling Ti in characters unmistakably

"Near the south gate, heavenborn."

"Very well." They walked on together, Hanecy a and plodded slowly after them, blink-

certain of crooked work somewhere. This cicada had come from no fish belly; it was the one lost by the smallpox victim. How had the solharacters he recognized instantly as of course. It was the scented lure to

some fine trap. "Good enough," thought Hanecy confidently. "If they want to set a trap, I'll spring the trap and grab the bait. And I only hope Benson shows

up in person." He was utterly wrong in his suspicions, of course. In this instance he was being made the butt of a fate which was inexorable and insatiate. * * * *

THEY came to the gate, a narrow entrance in the high walls, where deographed advertisements and bandit rewards were pasted on the stones. Many folk were going in and out past the loafing guards. The soldier glanced around, saw that his comrade had not yet arrived with Benson, and touched the arm of Hanecy.

and speak with my comrade. It is necessary to avoid suspicion from the others-"Very well," said Hanecy grimly.

thinking of the trap. He followed the soldier to a house hundred yards distant. His pistol verready, he entered and was guided to a vacant room. This was a gambling be trusted to know good yin-piao? house, he perceived. His guide seemed Here, take your share. But, by the to be known here. Once in the room, wu fu, give him the jade quicklythe soldier asked bluntly what the cleada was worth to Hanecy. The

"I will get the stone from my comrade, heavenborn," eagerly said the suspicious, watchful, very alert. All soldier, and departed. Hancey sat this looked too good to be true. waiting, pistol in hand, but nothing happened.

the poor scholar, mumbling to him- uttered an angry exclamation. self the maxims of Chu-ko Liang. At tife gateway he paused, glancing over thirty taels here—the price was one the papers posted on the wall. Among hundred! Where are the other twenty, ning. "So you're going down-river in them was news of the murder of the thief?" noon in the Street of Ten Thousand curse and tugged at his ragged girdle.

The poor scholar read these notice he was leaving the gateway of the ulous, the scholar stood there gaping and fired twice, the Tu-kung tsz, he was halted by a getful of all around him. His single-

had summoned him, came from the the room and dropped into an alley.

sign that all was well. At this instant, a crucial instant in don't think I need waste much pity Fate's plan, the poor scholar came on them."

"How much, excellency?" asked the

halt, gaping at the stone in astounded asked questions as he went. recognition. He was unobserved by

Then from the scholar burst a chattering shout:

"Help These are the men who Street of Ten Thousand Bright Flow-

ers! That green-stone insect-" banditry on the side are by no means yamen. fools. Benson was no fool either, but he was caught by surprise. As he scholar's outburst with a knife-thrust.

into mad confusion. The poor scholar lay gasping out his life, while above him trampled a wild throng. Murder and sudden death hovered close. The only persons in the crowd who actually knew what was going on were the two soldiers. And when Benson tried to find them, furious at what had happened, they were gone.

THE soldiers straightened out the crowd in short order, but there was none to explain. The poor scholar ders at questions, pretending he did between the eyes! not understand. A good many preclous minutes were wasted while the fact, the revolver was displayed. officer in charge of the gate was had taken place. Finally it was real- sedan chair. He directed the bearers the description the men recognized sat back with a smile on his lips. their comrade. The officer reflected men were great patrons of the near- emperor's amulet with much satisby gambling house. "Two of you will remain with me

to watch the gate," he said. "The rest of you seach Ma Jen's gambling his brier, chuckling to himself. house and the nearby dwellings. Tho murderer has fled there for hiding." In this, by chance, the officer was

smelled of sam shu to keep him com-

where his friend and partner, Toptit, where his friend and partner, Toptit, awaited him. So far as the emperor's outside the main entrance of the temperor's outside the main entrance of the temperor to get busy. His nerves were on a mon, ash and various fruit trees, no-Not a sound reached him. He it prefers the oaks and the supersti-

asleep. A slow and insidious doubt of the British isles and the lands on that this could be a trap gradually the south side of the English channel his mind lost in contemplation of the rose in his mind. That soldier had got the idea that it was the soul of lied, of course, but had not told the the oak, and that, as it remained sort of lies Benson would have insti- green while the oak had lost is fo-Hanecy, as he strode along, was gated. Benson was too clever to hand liage, it was an immortal thing, and out that fish-belly stuff-

A scurry of hastening feet in the his armpit, then paused.

"By the blessing of the five bats!" said the voice of the soldier who had derful powers and properties were atguided him. "Here is the place-and tributed to the mistletoe, and when there is no time to lose if we are to carry our heads safe out of the city! clung to many of the pagan ideas Take the money and be satisfied, fool!"

Another voice grumbled something inaudible. The door was flung open. Hanecy rose as the two soldiers entered and closed the door. They wer panting, their eyes showed fierce excitement, the hand of the one was red and promiscuous then than now, and with hastily wiped blood.

Hanecy perceived that much had been going on somewhere, but he was too wise to ask any incautious ques

tions. "Here is my comrade, heaven born," said the first soldier hurriedly. "He has the green stone. Give us the

money and let us depart." Hancey extended the sheaf of notes "Heavenborn, come with me to a The soldier tucked them away, then place of waiting. Then I will return turned with an angry gesture to his as having peculiar appropriateness as

"The green stone, quickly! Give him the Han yu!" "First give me my money," scowled

the other. "Besides, how do I know the money is good? It is not sil-

The scowling, hesitant bandit produced the green clcada. Hancey took American silently produced a hun- it and slipped the stone into his pocket. His lips clenched grimly. What went into that pocket of his did not come out easily. He was still

The first soldier was turning to the door when his comrade, who had Meanwhile had come to the gate been examining the notes given him, "Here, vile one! There are only

prominent bookseller, Wang, whose As he spoke, a knife leaped out into body had been found shortly after his hand: The first soldier uttered

Close upon that explosion came too sharp, brutal reports. Hanecy had no with gaping jaw. All thought of the doubt whatever that this was a mock wise maxims was stricken from his quarrel, designed to catch him off kindness." "Well, so long! I'll be around in the mind. He realized that Wang had guard and finish him. When the knife been murdered en route home from showed, his hand was at the butt of the temple, after buying that green his automatic. When the revolver eighth-century poet and patriot. . As cleads from him. Aghast and incred- came out he ducked across the room

Thus stood the situation when Ben- ing. Hanecy did not open the door son, accompanying the soldier who but darted to the window that lighted

"I believe I was wrong, after all," reflected Hanecy. "I don't think Ben-Hanecy's soldier, with the green son was responsible for this affair in cleada in his hand, stood inside the the least, to give the devil his due! city gate and waited patiently. He He would never have let that amulet fused to give as much as a hundred ably are that those two bandits back taels. When he saw his comrade ap- there framed up a game to rob and in his pockets. For he knew that proach with Benson in tow he made a murder me—I expect they got the amulet by killing some one else. I

through the gate, driven as a loiterer | Anybody who knew Hanecy would have smiled at this last, for Hancey Benson followed his guide to the was too strictly an apostle of effisoldier who awaited them. The lat- riency to waste any sympathy whatter silently opened his hand and ever. He lived very largely by riskof objects recently taken from the see a man at his side, gazing at the man took it. divided it into two por- local mandarin was hand in glove showed the green stone, and Benson's ing his neck, and he desired to go on living for a long time.

As soon as Hanecy emerged from soldier. "This is a true Han yu, as the rabbit-warren of alleys into a close-grown underbrush might lie a Benson took the green cleada, held was boiling with excitement. The it up, examined it closely. Six feet government buildings were close by, away the poor scholar came to a dead so he made his way to the yamen and

From those around Hanecy learned the three, for folk were eddying all that a poor scholar had been wan- that other himself! He pressed the around him, staring curiously at the tonly murdered near the south gate and that search was being made for the murderers, who were known. This gave him no clue, for he did not connect the matter with his two soldiers murdered the bookseller Wang in the so he determined to stick around and Sunset-horse and rider were in the Provincial soldiers who vary their ers a coin, and told them to wait for the rider sprawling at one side and legitimate occupation with a spice of him. Then he sauntered toward the

glanced up at the sudden shout, one bore two dead men in their midst. dizzily, the man crawled to his feet of the two men snatched the stone These were seen to be two of the and floundered toward the struggling from his hand; the other checked the yamen guard, and the bodies were beast. placed on exhibition. There was new Immediately the street was flung excitement when a proclamation was ing sigh. "His leg's broke. I can't—" brought forth and posted above the Hanecy read that proclamation,

found. These two murderers had fled a figure staggered on-slone. to a room in the gambling house of Ma Jen, where they had quarreled. One of them had drawn a revolver and shot one cartridge. That one justice, pierced both the murderersdirected by the hand of the gods, lay dead. Benson shrugged his shoul- that same bullet had shot each man In evidence of this supernatural

Hanecy turned away, got out of the eliciting from the throng just what crowd, and climbed into his waiting

ized that the scholar had been wan- to the house of Kiang, the fur dealer, tonly murdered by a soldier, and from on the other side of the city, and then "Great is the justice of the manda a while, then remembered that his rin!" he murmured, and patted the

faction. "I don't understand all this -but I'm satisfied." And he tucked some tobacco into

About Mistletoe.

only a brick bed and a jar that O'CE more we come to the season of the mistletoe. The mistletoe is a parasite which lives off trees. pany, Jim Hanecy waited for some- Not only does it grow on the oaks, thing to happen. He felt so certain but it is found on the pecan, hickory,

tably the apple, pear and cherry. But this time of day tious and mysterious Druids, the priests of the pagans

they thought of it as a symbol of everlasting life. To the Druids there passage. Hanecy's hand slid toward was something sacred about the oak tree, and, of course, the soul of the oak tree was especially sacred. Wonpaganism passed the early Christians about the plant. There was good luck in mistletoe. At Christmas, the merriest day of the year, our northern ancestors would hang a branch of mistletoe over the entrance to the home as a sign of good luck and welcome. Kissing was much commone people entering the door over which the mistletoe hung exchanged kisses with the host and his family. In that way kissing and mistletoe probably came associated, so that when me hung mistletoe indoors as a decoration it continued to be the sign of the kiss, or an invitation to kissing. We still kiss under the mistletoe, and many of our people still think of this plant as something mysterious and

Legend of the Tree. ONE story of the origin of the

evergreen tree as the Christmas tree among the people or northern Europe is given in one of the legends "Oh, turtle's offspring! Can I not of St. Winnifred. It is one of the many thousands of those simple and beautiful beliefs that have attached themselves to the great midwinter festival. It is related that St. Winnifred, a great Christian missionary among the pagans of the north, began cutting down a "sacred" oak which had been an object of worship by the pagans whom he was trying to ead a-right. While he was hewing down the huge tree it was blasted and uprooted by a sudden whirlwind. Close beside the giant oak was a young fir tree, which was not harmed either by the whirlwind or by the fall of the oak. Then St. Winnifred is reported to have spoken as follows: "This little tree, a young child of

the forest, shall be your holy tree tonight. It is the wood of peace, for your homes to be built of. It is the sign of an endless life, for its leaves are always green. See how it points toward heaven! Let this be called the tree of the Christ Child! Gather about it, not in the wild woods, but in your nomes; there it will shelter no deeds of blood, but loving gifts and acts of The fir tree, the common evergree tree of the northern regions, became

the holy tree of the converted pagans, and in its honor or in the memory of the thoughts it stood for, they decolarge temple in whose grounds stood at the notices like a man dazed, for- He did not need to look to verify rated it with lights and gifts at Christmas.

CHRISTMAS EVE AT PILOT BUTTE

(Continued from Fourth Page.)

almost forgotten in the temporary joy of being again in the saddle. It had been a dream: his free days were over. He was a hunted thing now, which he had combated the dangers of a railroad's every fighting resource to procure, useless-a mere weight coner or later the man he had left have a little hot water and some behind in the cabin would fight his way back to his companions. There would be a fresh horse and a new trail-and pursuit again.

Quickly, almost spasmodically, Bart Carson dug his beels into the flanks of his mount and veered its course toward the dim distant shadows which marked the wildest, most desolate section of Pilot Butte. There in the ravines, and among rocky hills and street he perceived that the quarter chance. There, too, Bart Carson smiled grimly, with the knowledge that the slopes of Pilot Butte, where one victim of the dead Walker still struggled against enveloping adversity, soon would shelter another-and horse to greater speed.

Dawn broke, to reveal a slouched figure nodding over the back of a swaying horse. By noon the bleak outline of Pilot Butte was nearer. see what happened next. He called shadow now. Then, without warning, an empty sedan chair, gave the bear- the horse coughed, stumbled and fell, groaning pitifully with the pain of the impact against an arm swollen to Presently a surge of the crowd gave such proportions that it stretched the way before a group of soldiers, who coat sleeve which bound it. Hazily,

"Up boy!" he begged. Then a gasp-Hesitating, almost fearful, he looked about him and drew the revolver. He aimed, turned away his standing back in the crowd. It was head. A booming report, thrown to the effect that the ways of the back in hollow, mocking reverberagods were inscrutable and very pro- tions from the hills and gulches. Then

Miles it seemed-furlongs in reality. A stumbling exit from a clump of underbrush, and Bart Carson drew himself up in surprise. He had flounbullet had, by the inevitable laws of dered onto a roadway. Not fifty feet away a man was plodding toward him on horseback. "Merry Christmas!" It was the

"star route" mail carrier. Carson pulled the sharp, cold air cutting into his lungs. "Christmas eve," he muttered. Then

ouder, "Merry Christmas!" But the other man said nothing nore. His eyes were centered on that bandaged, tell-tale hand; the rowels Then: "Something for mamma." of his spurs had cut deep into his horse. Bart Carson reeled into the brush again-the first telephone would carry the news, and horses could travel swiftly on that road! More, thoughtful. he knew that by now every rancher had been made a deputy, every cowpuncher a man appointed in the service of the law, and hot for the advertised reward! He ran, aimlessly, how far he never knew, to stop at last, panting and gasping, the pull of blood pounding through his swollen arm and wrist. His head ached-but not as much as that arm. But not even the arm itself ached half as much as something else which Bart Carson never had felt before-his heart.

ALONE on the top of a knoll, he valley and at the ramshackle house it held. He recognized it-the home of the woman whose husband Walker self now a kindred spirit in a world of enemies. Smoke feathered from the chimney. In the window a light gleamed faintly against the dull glow of the fading winter sunset. There was warmth and-

Water! Hot water in which bathe the blackening wrist and angry, swollen arm. Hot water and poultices blamed reindeers just took ever'thing and temporary surcease from pain. And there was no telephone-to send that, all right." a warning.

But Bart Carson shook his head. "She's a woman. It might scare-A start! Something had moved in the underbrush at his right. A hand went to the gun, halted there, then iropped. A great, dark object was moving through the snow, head stretched forward, natural timidity forgotten in the call of preservation- | handcuffs. Bart spread them, then starving elk, following the scent of hav even into a ranchyard. And Bart Carson watched, watched while the emaoiated beast clattered through the stream at the foot of the hill, edged through the half-open gate and to the haymow: watched as a woman came forth, patted the hunger-tamed beast, pulled forth fresh hay for it, and returned to the house. Bart Caron waited no longer. Like a starved elk, he, too, went forward.

Timidly, almost haltingly, he pass through the gate and approached the door. He knocked-then stood hesitant as the woman faced him in the lamplight. At last:

"I-I guess you know who I am? She held the lamp closer. "I've seen you somewhere. But

A child, a girl of perhaps seven, had ome to the door and was peeking from behind her mother's skirts. The bandit looked down at her and smiled. Then he faced the woman again. "I'm Bart Carson. I guess you've

"I'm hurt. I followed that elk down nere. Me'n and him's a lot alike. Can come in-please?"

There was a moment of indecision The child, bolder now, edged forward and stared up at him. "Why don't you let him

mamma?" The woman drew back. The way was open. Bart Carson stepped within and closed the door. The woman set the lamp on the table. The bandit faced her.

"I reckon we kind of belong to the same brand, Mrs. Walker," he began. "I know about you." "You?" "Yeh." The old drawl had come

back into his voice. "I went up to

the pen the first time to save your husband. That is-I thought he was the brother of-of that other woman. She didn't answer-merely stood studying him through the glow of the

"He's dead," he said. "Got kille

n San Francisco. A wave of relief seemed to pas over the prematurely aged face. "It's wrong to say it," came at last

"But I'm glad. He never-" Sh stopped. "You can't stay here-" "No." Bart Carson forced forwar his blackened hand, the swollen fles! protruding between the interstices o the bandage. "No-if I could jus

arnica if you've got it-and a little grub. Then I'll-gc on." She turned to the cook stove with out a word, and Bart Carson sank inte a chair, soon to feel the relief of ho water and a soothing lotion. Then as he bound the wound with fresl cloths and the woman busied hersel

looked up at him. "Who are you?" she asked.

"Me?" Bart Carson smiled down a her. "Don't you know who I am! I'm Santa Claus."

with the preparation of food, the

child slid between his knees and

"You?" She sniffed. "Where's you "Shaved 'em off about a week ago

but they're comin' back again. Here' -he caught her hand and raised it to his face-"feel 'em." "They're awful scratchy!"

"Sure they are!" Warmth and com-

panionship were having their effect The fatigue was fading-more and more the smile was broadening. "Sure as shootin'-but you ought to see 'en when they're all grown out." "Carrie!" the woman called from the stove, "pull down the curtains."

The child obeyed, and Bart Carson looked up gratefully. "Thanks!" The woman only nodded; the child

was back at the stranger's knee. "How'd you get hurt-if you're Santa Claus?"

"THAT'S just it!" Bart Carson leaned forward. "My reindeers ran away on me, the whole caboodle of 'em, and I sprained my wrist tryin' to hold 'em in. It was just a fresh-broke team," he explained, "and "Honest?" the child's eyes were

wide with belief now. The man grinned and twisted her curls with a finger. "What're you going to get for Christmas?

"Nothing."

ow?" Then he leaned closer. "Rec'lect, I'm Sandy Claus. What do you want?" A finger went to childish lips. There was a fidgety moment of thought.

"Sure?" Bart cocked his head. "Sure

"What?" "I don't know-something. She ain't got anything." Bart Carson's eyes became strangely

"What's the matter with this fine house here and this ranch and---"We're going away from here." "Carrie!" But Bart Carson raised his hand in

remonstrance, and the woman was silent. He turned once more to the child. "Why?" he whispered, and nodding

toward the mother. The child's lips sought his ear. "I don't know. She's going into own and work and-"

Bart nodded. "Yeh. I understand. And what do you want for yourself '

"How'd you like to have a lot of em? That'd go to sleep and ever'thing, and-"What's that?" The woman stepped

to the window, pulled back the shade and stood peering out. "Where are they?" The child had crawled to his knee. Bart laughedapparently forgetful of the woman at

"Oh, I'll have to get 'em. Them when they cut loose. But we'll fix "There are three men just coming

he window.

down the hill on horseback," the woman was saying. "They're headed for the house." "Reach in this pocket over here, honey. I can't on account of my hand." Bart still disregarded the warning. "Feel something in there?" "Yes." The child brought out the

released the safety. "Be careful of 'em-don't snap 'em shut, 'cause they won't come open-"Didn't you hear me?" The woman was beside him. "There's three

men-"I heard." Bart Carson looked up with a smile. Then: "Listen, honey," he explained to the

child. "See if you can remember this: 'I caught him. I claim the reward." "I caught him," came the childish answer, "I claim the reward." The thin hand of a woman tugged

hard at his sleeve. "It ain't right-" she began, but Bart Carson's smile halted her. He turned to the child again and placed his strong wrist close to the swollen one.

"Put them there bracelets over my wrists right there, honey. That's it. Now press on 'em until they click. Harder-there!" His face went momentarily white with the pain, but his smile did not fade. "Now listen. Ol' Sandy Claus has to do things in a kind of funny way. If you're going to get that great big present I was telling you about, you'll have to act

just like I tell you. Understand?" She bobbed her head. Bart Carson Behind him the woman watched in silent tensity. The bandit shook his shoulders as though to rid them from a great load which had burdened them for a long time.

"Fine!" His voice boomed cheerily. "Now take hold of that chain-right between my wrists; that's it-only be easy, that left hand's powerful sore. Now we'll go outside and meet-some friends of mine. And don't forget what I told you to say: 'I caught him. I claim the reward." The rote was repeated.

"That's right," Bart Carson pulled a deep breath. "That's right, honey. Come on." The door opened. Together they

went forth, to the night and the snow

and to the three men who were opening the gate. (Copyright, 1921. All rights reserved.)